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WILDLIFE SERVICES—VIRGINIA

Contact Information:

Martin Lowney, Virginia Wildlife Services State Director

P.O. Box 130

Moseley, VA 23120

Phone: (804) 739-7739 FAX: (804) 739-7738

Toll-Free Number: 1-866-4USDAWS 1-866-487-3297

E-mail: martin.s.lowney@aphis.usda.gov

Web site: www.aphis.usda.gov/ws

USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Virginia

Every day, residents, industries, organizations and agencies call on Virginia Wildlife Services (WS) for help in protecting agriculture, human health and safety, natural resources, and property from damage or threats posed by wildlife. WS' professional wildlife biologists respond to these requests with effective, selective, and humane strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts.

WS works to protect property and reduce human health and safety risks at airports, schools, and along roadways. The program also protects people, pets, and livestock from wildlife-borne diseases and predation; guards many natural resources, such as endangered mussels and shorebirds from wildlife depredation; and educates the public about wildlife and wildlife damage management. Specific projects conducted by Virginia WS include, protecting threatened piping plovers and gull-billed terns from predation; conducting sampling and monitoring for West Nile virus and rabies; and managing damage caused by beavers, deer, pigeons, starlings, and other wildlife.

Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable many people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this technical assistance can be provided over the phone. WS also provides on-site expertise, or direct assistance, to manage complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts scientific research across the Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology.

Protecting Livestock from Predation—Coyote predation to sheep, goats, and calves has been an escalating and spreading problem since the early 1980's. Prior to Wildlife Services implementing a cooperative coyote predation management program with the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the average sheep producers lost 17 lambs to coyotes each year. Today, losses have been reduced to an average of three sheep per farm per year. Similarly, goat and calf losses to coyote predation in western Virginia have been reduced to between 17 percent and 57 percent. More than 300 livestock producers received assistance from Wildlife Services in 2003 and 2004.

Protecting dairies and cattle feedlots from starlings—Starlings consume livestock feed and contaminate feed and water at dairies and cattle feedlots in Virginia. The loss of feed and diminished weight gain and milk production from sickness caused by starlings reduces profits and increases costs to farmers. The Wildlife Services program developed a new service to assist farmers with starling damage. The user fee program reduces starling populations at farms with a registered



toxicant only available to Wildlife Services. Starling damage is reduced an average of 98 percent at most farms within one to two weeks.

Protecting Human Safety at Airports—The Federal Aviation Administration, U.S. Air Force, U.S. Navy, and Virginia Department of Aviation recognize Wildlife Services as the expert in reducing threats to aviation at airports and military airbases. The Wildlife Services program enters into agreements with airports and air bases to conduct wildlife hazard assessments, wildlife hazard management plans, and to reduce threats to aviation safety. Threats are reduced by altering habitat, conducting harassment programs, removing threatening deer, geese, vultures, and other wildlife, and excluding wildlife from the airfield environment. The Wildlife Services program assisted seven military airfields, nine certificated airports, and 15 general aviation airports in Virginia in the last two years.

Increasing Safety on Virginia's highways—Beaver damage highways in Virginia by flooding roads, saturating the road bed, and felling trees on the highway. This damage increases maintenance and repair costs for the Virginia Department of Transportation and threatens highway safety. The Wildlife Services program provides assistance by making site and wetland evaluations and removing problem beaver. This service saved the Virginia Department of Transportation more than \$468,000 in 2004.

Protecting Human Health from wildlife disease—Raccoons were responsible for 56 percent of the 446 cases of rabies reported to the Virginia Department of Health in 2004. Raccoon rabies occurs throughout Virginia except for four south-western counties. The Virginia Wildlife Services program partners with the Virginia Department of Health and local health departments to prevent the westward spread of raccoon rabies and hopefully one day, to eliminate raccoon rabies. A multi-state effort has implemented a 35-mile wide barrier of vaccinated raccoons along the Appalachian Ridge from eastern Ohio, through West Virginia, Virginia and Tennessee, and down into Alabama. Within Virginia, the Wildlife Services program assists the state in monitoring and surveillance for raccoon rabies and educating the public about controlling rabies.

Protecting Shorebirds, colonial waterbirds, and black ducks from predation—Some of Virginia's treasured natural resources nest on the state's barrier and Chesapeake Bay islands. Many of these bird species have declined up to 85 percent in the last 20 years due to raccoon, red fox, and gull predation. Some of the bird species such as piping plovers and gull-billed terns are now threatened species. The Wildlife Services program is partnering with state and federal agencies, a state college, and environmental organizations to save the birds. The Wildlife

Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting property and public safety from beaver damage
- Protecting civil and military aviation from wildlife strikes
- Protecting people, pets, and livestock from raccoon rabies
- Managing damage caused by Canada geese
- Protecting livestock and pets from coyote and black vulture predation

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Virginia:

- Improving beaver, muskrat, and nutria damage management methods
- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Managing vulture damage to livestock and property
- Evaluating waterfowl as disease, parasite, and noxious weed reservoirs
- Managing wildlife transmission of rabies

Services program prepared a management plan to protect the birds and implemented predator removal from the barrier islands. The results have been outstanding with Virginia now boasting the highest piping plover fledgling rate in the nation with 2.65 chicks per pair, a doubling of oystercatcher production on Metompkin Island, and re-colonization of Wallops Island by piping plovers.

Protecting Endangered Mussels from Predation—The Clinch and Powell River drainages of southwestern Virginia boast some of the most diverse ecosystems in the United States. Unfortunately, some mussel species have yet to recover from historic over harvest and water quality problems. While harvest has stopped and water quality has improved, predation by muskrats and raccoons and sedimentation by beavers has increased. The Wildlife Services program agreed to assist the state of Virginia in protecting these rare mussels by removing muskrats and raccoons eating rare mussels and beavers burying mussels with silt in small stretches of the Clinch and Powell River drainages. This action will speed up the recovery of this rare Virginia resource.

Addressing Residential Property Damage Caused by Roosting Vultures—Black vulture populations have increased 147 percent in the last 20 years. Turkey vultures have increased 59 percent in the last 20 years. This has resulted in Wildlife Services receiving increasing requests for assistance due to vulture roosts in subdivisions. Vulture roosts may contain more than 1,000 birds. The vultures defecate on the homes, barbecues, children's toys, and cars; they pick at and damage the roof, windows, and caulking of homes; and the overpowering ammonia like odor from the fecal droppings prevents people from using their property. Wildlife Services works with local government and communities to set up harassment programs to disperse vultures. When necessary, Wildlife Services helps local governments and land owners get federal permits to shoot a few birds to reinforce harassment. Wildlife Services has helped more than 60 towns with large vulture roosts.

Protecting Property from Canada geese—More than 200,000 resident Canada geese call Virginia's cities and towns home. They leave more than three pounds of feces per bird each day on lawns, walkways, and property. About 200 homeowners, golf courses, schools, parks, and shopping centers request assistance with goose problems each year from Wildlife Services. Property owners are taught to exclude and harass the geese and, where feasible, set up hunting programs. Sometimes the best solution to a neighborhood goose problem is reduction of the local population to more reasonable numbers. The Wildlife Services program created a program to remove problem Canada geese when requested by the community. Nearly 2,000 resident Canada geese are captured each summer in approximately 20 communities and provided to meat processors where they are donated to local food charity programs.

Protecting property from deer—There are more than one-million white-tailed deer in Virginia, possibly more than during pre-colonial times. As Virginia becomes more urbanized, hunting becomes a less effective tool to manage the state's deer population. The result has been increasing damage to ornamental plantings on private property and destruction of migratory bird nesting habitat and trees in public land forests. There has also been increasing deer – vehicle collisions on the state's highways and local roads. The Wildlife Services program has started working with local governments to reduce deer damage to property by reducing local deer populations. The Wildlife Services program has expertise to implement sharp-shooting programs. Sharp-shooting programs have been implemented in northern Virginia, the eastern shore, southwestern Virginia, and at numerous airports around the state.

Protecting Multiple Resources from Pigeon Damage—Pigeons are seen throughout Virginia. This foreign species was introduced from Europe and has settled in urban and suburban areas as well as on Virginia's farms. We work with universities, manufacturers, business districts, and local government to reduce pigeon populations so as to reduce damage to property and to protect human health. Pigeons damage property with acidic fecal droppings and spread disease through feces and parasites. The defacement of buildings and public areas with feces and fecal droppings in warehouses, hangars, office buildings, and barns contribute to unhealthy and unsanitary work environments. It also discourages

Major Cooperators

- Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
- Virginia Department of Transportation
- Virginia Department of Health
- Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
- Metropolitan Washington Airport Authority
- Virginia Cooperative Extension Service
- Langley Air Force Base

business. The Wildlife Services program has special tools and knowledge to manage pigeon damage. We work with dozens of localities annually to reduce pigeon damage.

Looking to the Future

In Virginia, local government is being overwhelmed by an increasing number of requests for assistance with wildlife damage problems. Under these circumstances, local governments often lack the expertise, resources, and legal authority to manage wildlife. The challenge for Wildlife Services will be to create effective wildlife damage management programs for urban and suburban environments with scarce funding. Also, the role of private sector nuisance wildlife control operators needs further refinement if they are going to assist with a growing problem.

Wildlife damage to public and private property and human safety are concerns for wildlife managers. This is particularly true at airports. Additional attention must be given to this very specialized area of work. The public is relying more on aviation to move people, goods, and services. As wildlife populations and the number of daily flights continue to increase, the challenge will be to protect aviation safety and property. Wildlife Services will be called upon to do more to protect the flying public, support the mission of the Air Force, Navy, Marines, and Army, and assist businesses by protecting goods and services that rely on aviation.

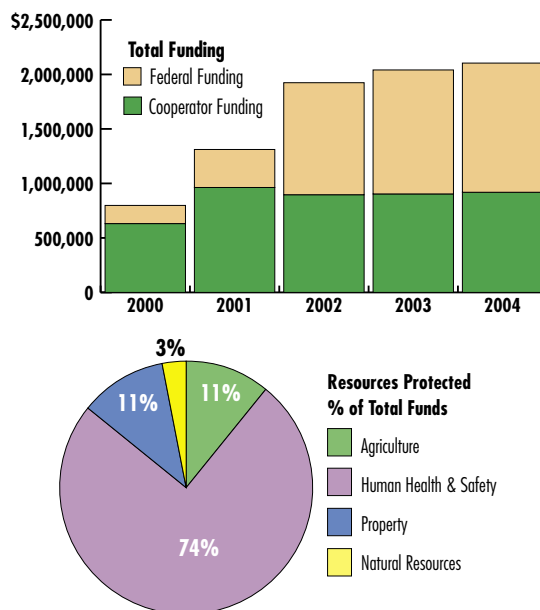
While some wildlife species are becoming overabundant, other wildlife species are becoming rare due to predation by invasive or non-native wildlife, or wildlife better adapted to exploit man's changes to the environment. If we are to have healthy ecosystems, then Wildlife Services may be asked to reduce predation pressures on rare birds and mussels. Funding sources will need to be identified to protect these special public resources.

The State also has a need to manage the transmission and spread of raccoon rabies. Virginia Wildlife Services is currently participating in our national effort to prevent the westward spread of raccoon rabies, and, hopefully, to eliminate rabies from the United States.

Agriculture is the largest employer in the state of Virginia and makes the largest economic impact of any industry. Yet, competitively low profit margins make staying in business difficult for family farms. Wildlife Services will be looking for more ways to help keep Virginia Agriculture in business by finding cost effective and practical ways to reduce competition with increasing numbers of deer, geese, coyotes, vultures, raccoons, crows, gulls, and other wildlife.

Virginia Wildlife Services Funding

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators; such as livestock producers; private individuals; businesses; and other Federal, State, and Local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. Major funding is provided through the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF), which under State law must provide a wildlife damage program. Because of the effectiveness of the Federal program, the UDAF chooses to cooperate with us in a single, responsive effort.



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